



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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**1991 WATERFOWL SURVEYS FIND MORE BLUE-WINGED TEAL AND SCAUP,  
FEWER PINTAILS THAN LAST YEAR**

This spring's breeding duck populations in the U.S. and Canada were up slightly from 1990, but numbers of most species continue to be lower than their average for the past 35 years, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported today.

"We are cautiously optimistic that ducks may have better nesting success this year," said Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Turner. "But it will take several more years of wet weather and improved habitat conditions before we can expect to see a major increase in duck numbers."

The total 1991 breeding population for dabbling and diving duck species in surveyed areas was up 6 percent from 1990. Most species remain below their long-term average from 1955-90 due to extended drought, intensive agricultural practices, and high predator populations.

Many prairie areas received normal or above-normal precipitation late this spring. Much of the moisture soaked into drought-parched soils, but some began to refill wetland basins. In some areas, survey pilots observed water standing in wetland basins that had been dry and were converted to farming during the 1980's. Because of intensive agricultural practices, many ponds have little or no surrounding natural vegetation to provide nesting cover for ducks.

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Mallard numbers in 1991 were unchanged from 1990 and remain 27 percent below their 1955-90 long-term average. Blue-winged teal numbers increased 34 percent from a record low 2.8 million in 1990 to 3.8 million in 1991, but remain 10 percent below the long-term average. It is unlikely all of the increase for blue-wings resulted from production in 1990; some of the increase probably resulted from a redistribution of blue-winged teal from unsurveyed areas due to improved habitat conditions in South Dakota.

Numbers of northern pintails fell 20 percent from 2.2 million in 1990 to a record low of 1.8 million this year. The decrease occurred primarily in the Canadian prairies, Montana, and North Dakota, important breeding areas for pintails. Pintail numbers are now 62 percent below the long-term average. A decreasing proportion of young and an increasing proportion of males in the U.S. harvest point to long-term recruitment problems for pintails. These problems are believed to result from changes in prairie habitats. Pintails nest in grasslands and space their nests far apart, often a significant distance from water, in order to avoid predators. The expansion of agriculture in the prairies has eliminated grasslands and reduced the availability of cover for nesting pintails.

The scaup breeding population increased 25 percent from a record low 4.2 million in 1990 to 5.2 million in 1991. Population estimates for gadwall, American wigeon, green-winged teal, northern shoveler, redhead, and canvasbacks did not change significantly from last year.

Several changes were made to the methods used to estimate duck numbers this year to provide more accurate and precise population estimates. The changes take advantage of recent improvements in survey techniques and were necessary to take into account the effects of the prolonged drought, which changed prairie habitat conditions and made a higher proportion of ducks visible to air survey crews than in past years. As a result of the improved survey methods, current and historical population estimates for some species have been lowered. The Service also has initiated additional surveys in new areas to expand the monitoring program.

Table 3. Breeding population estimates for 10 species of ducks, 1955-91 (in thousands).

Year	Mallard	Gadwall	American wigeon	Green-winged teal	Blue-winged teal
	Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.
1955	8708	692	3142	1795	5547
1956	9927	810	3008	1411	4903
1957	9226	692	2950	1015	4362
1958	11452	462	3371	1320	5387
1959	9231	529	3780	2582	5148
1960	7171	721	2921	1383	4177
1961	7237	597	3068	1692	3654
1962	5309	846	1929	639	2985
1963	6683	1094	1783	1135	3747
1964	5822	830	2438	1441	4045
1965	5261	1273	2332	1235	3646
1966	6723	1672	2330	1555	3800
1967	7533	1384	2346	1570	4533
1968	7152	1965	2407	1449	3492
1969	7590	1579	2955	1508	4145
1970	10026	1607	3473	2178	4866
1971	9464	1604	3321	1916	4620
1972	9326	1623	3196	1915	4294
1973	8152	1251	2887	1970	3350
1974	6849	1598	2717	1877	5005
1975	7631	1644	2746	1689	5907
1976	8053	1247	2493	1542	4763
1977	7561	1319	2583	1328	4628
1978	7538	1566	3295	2231	4506
1979	8060	1753	3097	2080	4867
1980	7790	1400	3593	2075	4909
1981	6569	1412	2934	1865	3757
1982	6377	1641	2460	1544	3673
1983	6455	1518	2635	1835	3378
1984	5333	1536	3004	1375	3986
1985	4839	1308	2045	1441	3470
1986	6874	1543	1740	1659	4450
1987	5630	1318	1978	1983	3533
1988	6348	1357	2194	2045	3979
1989	5503	1382	2009	1846	3192
1990	5305	1616	2089	1767	2828
1991	5353	1573	2328	1601	3779
1955-90 Avg.	7353	1288	2701	1664	4209
Percent Change in 1991 From:					
1990	+ 1	-3	+ 11	-9	+ 34
1955-90 Avg.	-27	+ 22	-14	-4	-10

Table 3. Continued.

Year	Northern shoveler Est.	Northern pintail Est.	Redhead Est.	Canvasback Est.	Scaup Est.
1955	1665	9520	592	599	5816
1956	1712	9967	780	703	5801
1957	1462	6356	544	625	5677
1958	1277	5862	449	755	5285
1959	1507	5610	524	499	7018
1960	1715	5400	484	598	4735
1961	1280	3856	318	440	5396
1962	1228	3397	507	364	5256
1963	1311	3616	415	523	5415
1964	1615	3026	519	701	5205
1965	1406	3677	599	522	4609
1966	2116	4778	712	690	4505
1967	2319	5288	737	505	4954
1968	1674	3506	518	578	4669
1969	2177	5915	635	508	5170
1970	2238	6396	624	582	5707
1971	2027	5901	540	451	5112
1972	2470	7045	554	427	7971
1973	1629	4355	503	627	6312
1974	2029	6639	629	513	5813
1975	1974	5900	833	616	6543
1976	1759	5481	672	620	5835
1977	1508	3948	641	690	6303
1978	1979	5113	743	380	6002
1979	2398	5393	696	576	7676
1980	1906	4520	760	760	6350
1981	2333	3483	602	627	6014
1982	2142	3709	618	512	5495
1983	1874	3515	713	527	7286
1984	1622	2980	675	532	6968
1985	1700	2513	581	385	5083
1986	2118	2736	560	438	5231
1987	1948	2629	502	454	4847
1988	1677	2014	441	437	4683
1989	1483	2098	504	455	4281
1990	1719	2243	466	511	4193
1991	1663	1798	437	463	5247
1955-90 Avg.	1805	4667	587	548	5645
Percent Change in 1991 From:					
1990	-3	-20	-6	-9	+25
1955-90 Avg.	-8	-62	-26	-16	-7